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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2008

In Today's Papers

Chief Prosecutor: Turkish Republic under Islamic Threat
Hurriyet, Milliyet, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman, Yeni Safak
and others report

Court of Appeals Chairman Hasan Gerceker has called for restraint amid criticism against his chief prosecutor's AKP closure case. Gerceker defended his chief prosecutor by saying Yalcinkaya was acting within the framework of his constitutional authorities and responsibilities. Mainstream Hurriyet writes on page one the Court of Appeals was uneasy with former Parliament Speaker Bulent Arinc's reaction to the closure case, "Death is the ultimate truth, and the chief prosecutor, too, should understand this." Prosecutor Yalcinkaya said he was merely fulfilling his duties to protect the regime. "The republic is under Islamic threat. You can find evidence for this in the indictment. I will never step back," he stressed. Police reportedly have tightened security measures to protect the chief prosecutor.

The Constitutional Court's acting Chairman, Osman Alifeyyaz Paksut, said the court rapporteur was examining the indictment prepared by the chief prosecutor, and would complete his recommendation within ten days. If the case is accepted, the AKP will be given time to prepare its defense.

Erdogan: Closure Case Will Only Increase AKP Votes

All papers cite unnamed sources revealing remarks by Prime Minister Erdogan in a closed-door party meeting yesterday. According to the sources, he expressed confidence that the case would only increase support for the AKP, but there were no plans for early elections. Erdogan also said they were discussing possibilities for changing the constitutional provisions related to the closure of political parties. Erdogan instructed the lawmakers to refrain from making public statements about the case. Sources also claimed Erdogan emphasized that his government had dealt a heavy blow to the 'Ergenekon' ring and other criminal gangs, implying that the case against the AKP might be revenge for these operations. However, in

a written statement released later, the PM's office denied he had discussed Ergenekon in the meeting.

Baykal: Indictment against AKP Unbiased

Opposition CHP leader, Deniz Baykal, told Star TV last night that in democracies, no one likes party closures. Baykal said the CHP was closed after the military takeover in 1980, and that he had been banned for five years. "We must think about the reasons the AKP is facing this closure case even though it received 46 percent of the vote. I think the indictment is impartial and responsible, and has been prepared within the authority of the prosecutor," Baykal said. Opposition far-right MHP Secretary General Cihan Pacaci said the constitution could not be protected by closing parties. "Turkey has closed 28 political parties; it only damages democracy," Pacaci said. He added they were ready to discuss proposals for replacing the sanctions against political parties with sanctions against individual party members.

Editorial Commentary on AKP Closure Case

"Self-Serving Democracy"

Okay Gonensin wrote in mainstream Vatan (3/18): "Democracy faces either open threats or hidden threats, including from self-serving democrats - those who want democracy to serve only their interests. The AKP is such an example, and the ongoing closure case has strongly proven it. The AKP government was in charge when we saw three party closure cases against [pro-Kurdish] HADEP, DEHAP and HAK-PAR respectively; and we didn't see any statements from so-called democrat figures of the AKP. Finally, the DTP, which has representation in parliament, faced a closure case and strong democratic statements are yet to be seen from the AKP. Now, AKP spokespersons cite their 47 percent of votes in the last election

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and cry disrespect for the people's will. In real democracies, there should be absolutely no difference between 47 percent and 1 percent, both of them are the will of people. However, self-serving democrats consider low percentages of votes as less important. The AKP presented itself as a party of freedoms; and the headscarf issue was linked to that characterization. While allowing the wearing of a headscarf is a fight for women's freedom in AKP's terms, the very same AKP has done nothing about honor killings, kept a blind eye to family violence and did not even think to take measures to increase the number of women in the labor force. It is also an indication of their self-serving democratic mentality that they have done nothing to pave the way for freedom of expression by changing penal code [301](#). Self-serving democracy is a hypocrisy which undermines democracy itself. That is the very reason Turkey's democracy is still stumbling."

"Closure Case"

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak (3/18): "For the first time in Turkey's history, a political party is facing a closure case after garnering 47 percent of the votes and the ruling party of government; and even worse, the case contains absolutely trivial charges. After reading the indictment, there is no way to defend the arguments. This is an attempted coup by using the judiciary and the rule of law. The general picture is one of state vs. government. Let's hope that following this unfortunate event, the AKP becomes even stronger than before and increases its votes and popular support. But if this case is a big game played by some military in order to create a militant democracy against the AKP, then the situation is serious and we will see more plots in the days to come."

"Embracing Democracy"

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal (3/18): "Going through the indictment against the AKP, it is obvious that the prosecutor collected statements and speeches from AKP figures. Can we conclude that there is no freedom of speech in this country? Can't we just let people express their feelings and thoughts, and do nothing as long as these expressions do not call for violence or discrimination? The case against the AKP is an example of penal code 301 vs. the AKP. Turkey has witnessed the prosecution and even killing of its citizens, like Hrant Dink, just because of what they

said. They were all subject to court cases on the basis of 301. This is the time for the AKP, particularly for PM Erdogan to realize the importance of removing all barriers against freedom of expression. I hope the AKP learns a lesson from this case."

TGS Chief Buyukanit on Sending Troops to Afghanistan
Sabah, Milliyet, Zaman: In an interview with Star TV, Chief of General Staff General Buyukanit said that "when I assumed this position I said we would not send a single soldier to Afghanistan to fight against terrorism. I still have this view. Our soldiers are deployed in Kabul area with ISAF and ISAF is not responsible for combating terror. The Turkish military is currently fighting terrorism here with tens of thousands of its members, therefore, new cannot afford to join the fight against terror on a different front."

Vice President Cheney in Iraq
Milliyet, Zaman, Cumhuriyet, Taraf: Mainstream Milliyet cites President Talabani's press office announcement about Cheney's surprise visit to Iraq. According to the release, Talabani and Cheney discussed the political process and security issues in Iraq as well as relations with Turkey. Islamist-oriented Zaman reports that VP Cheney at a press conference after the meeting with Prime Minister Al-Maliki, referred to Iraq's occupation in 2003 as "a successful effort."

NATO Secretary - General's Remarks.
Mainstream Sabah reports that NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer hosted a group of Turkish journalists at NATO headquarters.

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de Hoop Scheffer commented on Afghanistan, Kosovo and NATO's missile defense system. Regarding the missile defense system, Scheffer said "deployment of the missile defense system in Turkey is not on NATO's agenda."

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- The Constitutional Court has banned 24 political parties in Turkey since 1963.
- The trial of the suspects in the killing of three Christian Bible publishers in Malatya will continue on April 14.
- Turkish unemployment rate increased to 10.6 percent in 2007 in comparison to 10.5 percent in 2006.

International News

- German government spokesman Thomas Steg said Berlin was "worried" by the lawsuit against the AKP, calling the move "undemocratic."
- Two more houses of Turks living in Germany were torched last week.
- Secretary Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates met Putin and his successor, Dmitry Medvedev, in Moscow to discuss Washington's plans to build a missile defense shield in Eastern Europe.

WILSON